Rethinking Structural Mechanisms for Improving Rapid Identification of Transnational Child Victims of Trafficking in South Africa

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Abstract

Child trafficking is a multiple child rights violation that affects the lives of millions of children worldwide. However, the identification of victims of trafficking continues to be a challenge in the fight against trafficking, yet it is the first step towards recovery for victims. This article reflects the outcomes of a study that aimed to identify mechanisms for the rapid identification of victims of trafficking in South Africa. A qualitative approach was applied to get rich details from the study participants. Purposive sampling was used to select 32 study participants, including key informants and trafficked children, who were individually interviewed for the study. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Possible mechanisms suggested for improving the rapid identification of child victims of trafficking by the study participants included policy reforms, social mobilisation in communities, strengthening access to justice, and the development and training of practitioners. In the application of these mechanisms, a child-centric, victim-centred and time-sensitive approach needs to be adopted. The lack of rapid identification leads to invisibility of trafficked children that subsequently perpetuates the exploitation of children. To increase the identification and visibility of trafficked children and thereby improve psychosocial assistance, the walls of silence need to be broken down.

Keywords: children, identification, South Africa, trafficking

Introduction

Human trafficking is a crime, a rights violation and an emerging global public health and social care challenge. The South African Prevention and Combating of Trafficking

in Persons Act (SA TIP Act) (South Africa 2013) was modelled under the United Nations' Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, also referred to as the Trafficking Protocol or the UN TIP Protocol (UN 2000). Article 4(1) of the SA TIP Act provides a definition of trafficking that shows the act, means and purpose of exploitation. A key element of the SA TIP Act not mentioned in the UN TIP Protocol is that any person who adopts a child or marries a person forcefully for purposes of exploiting that person is guilty of trafficking. This is significant because it broadens the crime of trafficking. South Africa also recognises that people can be trafficked for the purpose of harvesting their body parts. According to the SA TIP Act, a child victim of trafficking is a person under the age of 18 who is found to be a victim of trafficking after assessment by social workers in terms of Article 18(6) of the SA TIP Act.

A report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF 2007) estimated that 1.2 million children are trafficked each year worldwide. A more recent study by the International Labour Organization (ILO 2017) estimates that there are 40 million modern day slaves (i.e. 25 million in forced labour and 15 million in forced marriages), and of these 1 in 4 are children. However, specific country statistics, including South Africa, are not clear, reliable or accurate (UNICEF 2007; Van der Watt 2015). What is evident is that children are also victims of trafficking.

The trafficking of children, while sharing some commonalities with adult trafficking such as the stages of trafficking, types and severity of violent act and their consequences, has unique features (Ahn et al. 2013; Muraya and Fry 2016; Thompson et al. 2017; Zimmerman, Hossain, and Watts 2011; Zimmerman and Kiss 2017). For example, when it comes to children, one only has to prove intended exploitation or actual exploitation (i.e. purpose) as evidence of trafficking and not the act, means and purpose as is the case of adult victims (Kiss et al. 2015; Lee 2011). Therefore, service providers should be able to intervene based on the characteristics of the exploitation that are unique to the victim (Wilson and Nochajski 2018).

This article emanates from the author's doctoral study on child trafficking and presents one sub-theme identified on structural mechanisms. The article sets out to identify the way in which structural mechanisms can ensure the rapid identification of child victims of trafficking. The need for revised mechanisms originates from the general approach used by the Department of Social Development (DSD) to identify all children in need of care and protection. The identification of trafficked and exploited children and their needs is a more complex process in comparison to that of abused or neglected children and thus requires a specialised approach. However, it is important to note that signs of abuse often present more clearly in exploited children and it can thus be a point of confusion and/or incomplete assessment as some signs of exploitation are not as tangible.

In discussing the structural mechanisms that could lead to the rapid identification of child victims of trafficking, an overview of child trafficking identification is first presented. Next, the research methodology is outlined and the findings from the data collected are discussed. Finally, the implications for children's well-being and social work practice are presented.

Identification of Child Trafficking

Children's rights which are violated during the trafficking cycle include the right to life, liberty and security, the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment (including slavery, servitude or forced labour) and the right to freedom of movement. These violations are both a cause and consequence of trafficking, subsequently making the protection of rights crucial when tackling any aspect of trafficking. The UN Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking state that failing to identify a trafficked person, at any stage of trafficking, results in further denial of their rights (OHCHR 2002). Appropriate identification is thus essential. The significance of identification in trafficking influenced the theme of the 2013 United States Trafficking in Persons (US TIP) report (US Department of State 2013) and it was noted as a challenge in the fight against trafficking. A survivor who was interviewed for the 2013 US TIP Report rightfully indicated how crucial victim identification is.

Identification is an institutional process and the key starting point for support and protection services for victims (Aradau 2004; Brunovskis and Surtees 2012). Noting that state parties engaged in child protection should adopt appropriate measures to identify victims of trafficking and offer appropriate post-trafficking assistance, the SA TIP Act guides interventions. First, the SA TIP Act was passed in response to the increase in the number of human trafficking cases being identified in South Africa. It aims to protect and provide support to victims of trafficking and to prosecute perpetrators (South Africa 2013; Van der Watt 2015).

Article 18(1) of the SA TIP Act (South Africa 2013) indicates that any person who suspects child trafficking or any designated child protection organisation that comes into contact with a child suspected to have been trafficked must report the case to the police for investigation. The presumed child victim of trafficking is then referred to designated social workers for investigation and placement in terms of the Children's Act (South Africa 2005). Secondly, the South African Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons National Policy Framework was recently launched to fight trafficking. However, the framework not being publicly available soon after the launch seemed to strain service provision further. In addition, the Children's Acts' related policies such as the National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction guide social workers regarding the identification of and assistance provision to child victims of trafficking. There are challenges pertaining to this strategy also. For example,

anecdotal evidence suggests that many social work practitioners are not aware of such policies owing to the uneven roll-out across the country and also because some who were trained on it have left practice. Another concern is that despite the legislative framework, piecemeal approaches are still being used to convict perpetrators of trafficking and the identification system is bureaucratic. Ultimately, trafficked children are more likely to fall through the cracks.

Before embarking on this study, the author established that there are identification concerns in South Africa. Identification is understood in this study as counter-trafficking professionals' quick and sensitive detection and recognition of trafficked persons or persons at risk of being trafficked and assisting them appropriately (Brunovskis and Surtees 2012). Warria and Chikadzi (2018) identified that a lack of rapid identification increases trafficked children's vulnerability and prevents the achievement and protection of their rights. Accordingly, recent research on sex trafficking by Boukli and Renz (2019, 71) argues for the reframing of politics of harm to avoid "discourses of 'exceptional vulnerability' and polarized notions of 'innocence' and 'guilt' informing hierarchies of victimhood" (or an "ideal victim"). Broadening the definition away from an "ideal victim" may facilitate rapid access to assistance. Furthermore, Warria (2016) suggests that instead of using indicators applicable to adults, specific indicators be used when identifying children so as not to disadvantage them in terms of access to justice, care and protection or downplay their right to special protection. Another concern is that children have been denied access to services because there was no proof of certification from the DSD or the absence of acts or means used when the children were being trafficked. The latter in fact, according to the Palermo Protocols, should only be relevant to adults and not to children. Finally, although child trafficking is contextual and methods shift, the needs of child victims may change, and indicators are not always updated.

In a study by Warria, Nel, and Triegaardt (2015), the following challenges in the identification of trafficked child victims were present in a South African study: the nature of trafficking, benefits that victims derived from the trafficking relationship, the lack of knowledge among professionals, and when family members are the perpetrators. These challenges support previous findings by Sigmon (2008) and Zhang (2012). They subsequently show that South Africa faces similar identification challenges and point to the possibilities of collaboration in the development of identification processes. Additional challenges identified in other studies include complex bureaucratic identification systems (Gozdziak 2010), memory loss due to trauma (Hopper 2004), and different categorisation of victimhood (Boukli and Renz 2019; Pearce, Hynes, and Bovarnick 2009).

Despite a commitment to provide care and protection for trafficked children, gaps in knowledge, policy and practice remain regarding victim identification worldwide (including in South Africa) (Farrell, McDevitt, and Faly 2010; Fong and Cardoso 2010; Hepburn and Simon 2010; Oketch, Morreau, and Benson 2012; Rigby and Whyte 2015;

Warria, Nel, and Triegaardt 2014; 2015). With these gaps, under-identification will continue to be a challenge in service provisions and the victims' recovery and healing processes are hampered. In addition, when victims are not identified, it infringes on their rights as they continue living at risk of further exploitation. The professionals unknowingly facilitate the growth of trafficking operations and it has a negative impact on achievement of some Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The non-exhaustive list of challenges presented shows that many diverse factors contribute to a lack of identification and that there is no simple solution when identifying victims. Appropriate and rapid care and assistance thus remain elusive (Warria, Nel, and Triegaardt 2015) resulting in further rights violations and vulnerabilities. Thus, it is important to identify and provide counters to discriminatory structural practices. This is the first study in South Africa that looked at transnational trafficking, victim identification and psychosocial service provision in social work. Thus the study outcomes are crucial to the discussion regarding improved rapid identification systems.

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was applied in the study to give deeper meaning to the participants' narratives (Fouché and Schurink 2011). Narrative construction is crucial as it helps in the development of responses or recommendations to the research issue being studied. Purposive sampling was applied based on the study participants' knowledge of the trafficking and child protection nexus. The construction of a singular narrative tends to overlook key systemic issues. To deal with this concern, triangulating data sources and incorporating diverse views (including the lived experiences of the children) provided a better orientation towards systemic solutions. The 22 key informants from government and (local and international) non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who were interviewed included 3 victim empowerment practitioners, 3 counter-trafficking researchers, 7 social workers, 7 child protection advocacy officers, 1 attorney and 1 detective in a specialised investigative police unit. A total of 10 children that were accessing post-trafficking assistance services in residential care facilities were also interviewed for the study because the self-representation and participation of victims of trafficking is a fundamental principle in transitional justice.

The sampling criteria used to identify and select the child participants were: non-South African, trafficked and/or rescued in South Africa, aged 10 to 17, accommodated at a residential care facility, and accessing psychosocial services (noting potential research risks of re-traumatisation as identified by Gearon (2019)). Trafficked children are a hard-to-reach research group and the sample chosen was not intended to be representative but focused on whether the research objectives of the study will be met. The children interviewed for the study were from Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With the child participants coming from

different countries, it was noted that abuse and exploitation of children is socially constructed and culturally–historically bound (Andrews 2012). In the light of this, cultural safety was prioritised and family and social circumstances leading to the trafficking acknowledged. Cultural safety extended to being aware of issues related to loyalty, taboos and shame that have an impact on children's narratives and to navigating the interviews with sensitivity, based on meaning-creation, negotiation and modification.

The research instrument used in the study for both the key informants and the child interviewees was the semi-structured interview schedule which acted as a framework for exploring the areas of interest. It had predetermined questions which guided but did not dictate the interview process, and helped to maintain the focus while allowing freedom to navigate unanticipated responses. The guiding questions specific to this article explored the participants' views on identification and assistance provision as related to the research objective. All the instruments were pretested and the necessary changes made under the guidance of the author's doctoral supervisors.

According to Randall, Anderson, and Taylor (2016, 345), "it would be naïve to assume that children participating in research studies are exempt from abuse and neglect. They may even be more vulnerable than their peers." In the light of this, the author adopted the principles of the WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women for the study (Zimmerman and Watts 2003), which generally look at risks, ethical considerations and practical realities. These principles are also applicable to child victims – enabling free, empowering, active and meaningful participation thus giving them a voice. Further, the child participants were told during the assenting process that they could report any ongoing abuse to the researcher for further reporting and intervention. The author also spent time getting to know the child study participants at the care facilities, by engaging in non-research activities and giving them space to check her out, before inviting them to participate in the study.

The data were analysed using a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), in line with the specific objective of the study and in conjunction with previous literature reviewed. The social constructivist framework in thematic analysis is aligned with the unique experiences of the children and service providers and in examining discourses and structural factors that influence identification processes in a socially constructed setting. The thematic analysis stages followed were familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching and reviewing themes, definition, naming and refining themes. The author's supervisors were instrumental in providing guidance when designing the data collection instruments, and during the data collection and analysis on ways of engaging with complex situations without losing focus and in relation to ethics of care (Randall, Anderson, and Taylor 2016).

Ethics approval for the study was granted by the Academic Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Johannesburg. Accordingly, participation

was voluntary, withdrawal could occur at any stage, assent and consent were ongoing and informed, and the data were anonymised. The principle behind the ethical considerations was the same, but the process was contextualised to the age of the study participants, i.e. children and adult interviewees.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section reports on key structural mechanisms recommended by the study participants to improve the identification of child victims. The structural mechanisms, which will be discussed in this section, are social mobilisation in communities, policy reforms, development and training on child trafficking indicators, and strengthening the access to justice.

Social Mobilisation Efforts in Communities

The current study found that social mobilisation in communities in which trafficking cases have been reported is a process that is not spontaneous, but one that should be prompted and shaped to ensure desired dialogues and sustainable involvement. In these instances, change is facilitated through different community members' complementary efforts. Through community policing, early warning signs of child trafficking as observed by community members were reported to the relevant authorities – in this case the key informants who were interviewed for the study. Field notes indicated that individuals acted alone and reported cases or acted collectively as part of organised action. All the key informants in the study unanimously agreed that communities need to be empowered and made aware of the issues involved because they can then act as a "bridge" between service providers and the community, and they can be crucial in identifying new cases of trafficking with the information they hold.

> I believe communities and adults in communities should be equipped and should be sensitised. They need to be sensitised to noticing these children at-risk, to valuing these children and to find out what is happening with these children. And they need to be told the process. They can be the first respondents in identifying the child, then taking the child to the social worker . . . (Victim empowerment practitioner at an international NGO)

This suggests that successful community mobilisation incorporates a series of collective actions and the findings demonstrate that no effort can be dismissed as being too insignificant to bring about change. This spirit of ubuntu (togetherness), as displayed in cases of identification by community members, advances children's best interests (Warria, Nel, and Triegaardt 2014) and should be supported as a best practice in the identification of victims. Ownership of the identification process, which is inclusive of community members' input, is critical to communal child protection and the achievement of SDG 17 (i.e. on resourcing partnerships). Mobilisation thus becomes

the backbone of strengthening the child protection structures, while ensuring responsiveness to the community's needs and demands.

The absence of social workers on the ground was also noted by the majority of the key informants as a reason for training community members who would then report pertinent trafficking cases and information to the social worker. In this situation, the traditional boundaries and turf lines do not apply, but rather a sense of partnership is created through information sharing, and more children are protected in the end. The following extract supports the notion of involving people at grassroots levels:

> You know very well that social workers are not on the ground. They can't identify. I'm not saying what they're doing is wrong, but I'm just saying the nature of how they operate doesn't really allow them to be there. So people will get to them and report the case and it'll get attended to but the people who are really on the ground are the NGOs and also they are more accessible so if we can capacitate them. (Child protection advocacy officer at an international NGO)

Thus, the number of registered practising social workers in South Africa is a concern in the context of ever-increasing social challenges in the country, the high turnover rate and brain drain (Mangena and Warria 2017). This means that most communities often lack the services of social service professionals who are mandated to identify and provide assistance to victims of trafficking. Therefore, a system of identifying trafficking cases and making referrals that is limited to social service professionals, police and justice systems fails to include trafficking cases that may be encountered in hospitals, communities, schools or elsewhere. This study supports adapting a systems approach to the protection of children (Wulczyn et al. 2010) in the building of alliances especially in instances where they have not worked together or where spaces have not been provided to ensure meaningful decision-making. An implication of this is that multidisciplinary, multilevel and multi-stakeholder approaches ought to be considered.

Policy Reforms

Political processes and systems can affect a trafficked child's vulnerability. Child protection vulnerabilities and child trafficking consequences cut across the responsibilities of multiple government departments in South Africa. This means it is pivotal to secure the involvement of a wide range of government actors leading to an integrated approach. This study revealed that factors influencing synchronisation, alignment and ownership in policy formulation and development are important in understanding child trafficking policies in South Africa because it allows for practical, realistic, and progressive approaches. All key informants criticised the existing legislative framework as not being aligned – a situation that made it tougher to identify trafficked children or promote their rights. This subsequently led to the fragmentation of assistance provision, as shown in the following extracts:

When I think of fragmented systems, I think of various government agencies or departments that aren't working together . . . to provide resources. So, you have maybe justice department not working alongside DSD. So therefore, the victim of trafficking is not protected from the perpetrator in the way that they need to be protected . . . so often departments have policies that are not even aligned with each other. It can result in a mess. (Researcher at an international NGO)

. . . if our legislation is not specifically mandating a particular department or any service provider then there's a loophole, because the people from that particular department or whatever don't feel that they own it, they don't have the ownership of that performance. (Social worker at a government department)

As indicated in the quotes above, by aligning policies and ensuring that there are prescriptive clauses included, the core systems in the lead departments in South Africa are strengthened, and there is greater impact in terms of trafficked children's rapid identification. This has the potential to enhance the credibility and reliability of South Africa's identification process, since all actors are aware of their responsibilities while widening the knowledge and practice base. In this way, child protection will continue to feature positively on South Africa's political agenda. Thus, findings from this study support the positive role attached to consistency that can be played through harmonisation of laws and policies in the creation of better policies and for the protection of victims of trafficking (ACPF 2010). In addition, the findings in this study are in support of the formulation of prescriptive legal frameworks in line with guidelines stating the responsibility of states (OHCHR 2002). Subsequently, the study findings presented have important implications for formulating and developing an identification policy framework that matters for children, and for professionals in realising children's rights and their protection (Robinson and Coetzee 2007; Todres 2012).

Development and Training on Child Trafficking Indicators

The majority of the key informants interviewed for the study have a working knowledge of child trafficking but were quick to acknowledge that they would benefit from additional tools and specific ongoing trafficking-related training. The informants identified the need for experiential training on signs of trafficking, accessible resources, and on preventive measures as having the greatest potential in increasing identification of child victims. The extracts below show support for development and training on trafficking indicators towards identification:

. . . the strengths is people who are adequately trained and capacitated to be able to identify and their training is practical. I think some kind of not really a checklist but a kind of indication of specific things to look out for or to possibly indicate that a child might possibly have been trafficked. (Child protection advocacy officer at a local NGO)

. . . how to identify if a [trafficked] child is in need of care and protection – for me that is very much crucial because if you can't identify, if you don't know what are the issues to look for in order to determine if the child is in need of care and protection, then

automatically you can sit with a child who is in need of care and protection and be unable to connect if there's a need. So the identification should be key. For me, [professional] people should be able to identify. That is the starting point for me. (Social worker in a government department)

The majority of the key informants motivated for clear trafficking indicators and checklists, which is a constructive step in victim identification. Nevertheless, these indicators can be limiting, especially in circumstances where the indicators are applied rigidly and/or if they are not assessed regularly, taking into account traffickers' ever-changing modus operandi, new trends, information, international conventions, and research findings in the trafficking field. Building on the South African child sexual abuse research by Spies (2006), knowledge, manifestation and the impact of an issue are crucial if the service providers are to support the clients through their healing process. Therefore, even in the development of identification indicators for South Africa, trafficking should be acknowledged as involving degrees of force, exploitation and positions of vulnerability and impact (Zimmerman and Kiss 2017) and that the training should be tailored to the specific South African audience.

Strengthening Access to Justice for Child Victims

The complexity, sensationalism and ever-changing nature of child trafficking sometimes make the trafficked children's narratives to be categorised as fantasies, unbelievable truths and/or lies. An initial sense of injustice is when trafficked children narrate their stories, and no one believes them. This shows a lack of appreciation in the value of the (professional) relationship, no recognition of the child's agency and therefore affects the child's future relationships, health and well-being. The extract below illustrates sentiments of a child participant on not being believed:

Lots of people don't believe us especially when you're trying to explain that someone has been doing this and that, you know, especially in my case since they [perpetrators] have been my relatives. Another thing is we are not being taken seriously . . . like I've never, how do I put it? I've never heard of a case that they have arrested someone that has been trafficking children, you know. It's like people who are trafficking are getting away with it. (Siphiwe, a Mozambican trafficked youth)

A professional cultural shift when responding to issues of victim identification is essential. This shift should be situated in the visible and hidden social structural factors in trafficking. If children are not taken seriously when they report cases, it might lead to a sense of mistrust, where, even if other cases come to their attention, they hesitate to report them for further investigation. This finding supports previous studies on child sexual abuse allegations and reporting or any instance of victimisation which suggests trafficked children should be viewed as partners in the care and protection sphere in relation to their own and other children's safety (Firmin, Warrington, and Pearce 2016; Gearon 2019). However, in line with the best interest principle, this does not mean that they should be entirely responsible for keeping themselves safe or that they necessarily

always know what is best. In child trafficking, social workers should advocate trafficked children so that they can access care and protection, as well as calling for perpetrators, and not the trafficked children, to be held accountable for their actions (Middleton, Sachs, and Dorahy 2017). This is illustrated in the following interview extract:

> Well, there's a number of justices . . . the child wasn't supposed to be trafficked. That is the first injustice . . . secondly, we all know that somebody who is trafficking needs to be prosecuted because that is a crime. So, to make justice to that, a person should at the end of the day be sentenced. Then another justice is that the child should go for therapy and the child should be safe even though it is difficult to guarantee 100% safety. (Social worker at a government department)

The thread that ran through the interviews with all study participants was the notion of justice and injustice. The present results are significant and call for collaboration with other stakeholders, such as the police, medical practitioners, and psychologists in the journey to justice (ILO 2006; Miller 2011). Indeed, one service provider cannot meet the complex needs of trafficked children and this study acknowledges that it is the right combination that matters in the identification process, rather than an optimal number of service providers (Shuker 2011). Access to justice for child victims can also be strengthened by listening and reflecting on trafficked children's lived experiences in the context of therapeutic jurisprudence.

Implication for Child Protection and Social Work Practice in South Africa

A range of implications and recommendations emerged from the study findings. These are practical mechanisms towards improvement of the rapid identification of child victims of trafficking. Firstly, rapid identification requires strengthening of both formal and informal partnerships. Mobilisation of informal institutions and developing connections between them and the formal institutions is essential. These inter-agency and multi-stakeholder collaborations on targeted actions should be implemented across the different stages of exploitation to prevent harm and trauma rather than have a "one-size-fits-all" approach that treats all trafficked children as a homogenous population. This is in support of the findings by Wilson and Nochajski (2018) that call for an inclusive approach by services providers to provide stage-specific services. The treatment of trafficked children as partners in the development of interventions leads to services that are sustainable, valued by children and takes on a pragmatic approach (Firmin, Warrington, and Pearce 2016).

Secondly, the identification of child victims of trafficking is not a simple clear-cut process, but it requires multiple structures and sensitisation of numerous diverse actors and agencies, including social workers, towards increasing opportunities for identification and assistance provision (Brunovskis and Surtees 2012).

Thirdly, contemporary socio-cultural and political constructions of victimhood should inform trafficking and child protection regulatory policies and practices (Boukli and

Renz 2019, 71). Training programmes for practitioners should incorporate the recognition of a wide range of indicators and victims, for example with diverse gender orientations, in different locations and presenting with different circumstances, towards decreasing missed, unsuccessful or inappropriate identification. Family members as perpetrators of trafficking can be a barrier to escaping a trafficking situation, and protection during rehabilitation and reintegration should include protection from such members. The latter can be achieved through partnerships with cross-border organisations for risk assessments of family or home circumstances before deportation or reintegration. Social work services should also deal with psychosocial vulnerabilities, for example economic environments leading to exploitation by family members.

Lastly, social work interventions during the identification process should adopt contextual safeguarding principles (Firmin, Warrington, and Pearce 2016). Social workers trained in traditional micro approaches to children's well-being and development and child rights and protection may find it challenging to intervene from a macro-structural perspective. This calls for an alignment of contextual structural protection and child-centred approaches. The recognition and engagement with structural challenges around rapid identification ensures that social workers are better equipped to support trafficked children in the structural contextual protection framework (i.e. located in intersections of time, place, culture and socio-cultural factors). The practice framework seeks to identify mechanisms that social workers and child development practitioners can become involved in when advocating and shaping settings that are developmentally safe for trafficked children as influenced by multiple and interlocking contextual dimensions of settings.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations that were identified in the overall study. The limitations that will be presented in this section include selection bias, bias in the child participants' responses, and generalisation. The first two are important to acknowledge because all the children, previously trafficked and rescued in South Africa and who were interviewed for the study, were receiving psychosocial assistance in a residential care centre (Larzelere, Kuhn, and Johnson 2004; Surtees 2007). The children may have provided socially desirable answers in their narratives on their lived experiences in such a manner that the information provided does not indicate that they are ungrateful for the support being received or does not harm the image of the organisation. The author had follow-up probing questions that allowed her to read the participants' behaviours that may have been culturally endorsed. In addition, during the assenting process, the child participants were reassured that there is no one right or wrong answer but rather that any response to the questions from them was acceptable. In other instances, the author shared divergent statements with the participants to show acceptability of different viewpoints based on lived experiences. Another limitation is that in as much as the

findings cannot be generalised to a larger South African population, they can be generalised to specific settings and specific research populations in South Africa.

Conclusion

The way protection of trafficked children is constructed and experienced by practitioners in South Africa does not reflect their lived realities. This research makes an important contribution to debates about identification as part of assistance provision, and calls for a more nuanced understanding of trafficking during policy and practice development. This article was not based on the intention to design a rapid identification framework that incorporates structural mechanisms, but rather to build on the structural competency approach which posits that social issues can be representative of structural decisions and violations (Ostrander, Melville, and Berthold 2017). It should further be recognised in future practice and research that child trafficking forms extensive health and other well-being determinants which are preventable and can draw on public health approaches, legislative and rights-based and community-based approaches that target risk factors prior to violence and exploitation occurring (Zimmerman and Kiss 2017). Future research must also include unidentified victims and consider their characteristics and experiences as this can inform interventions with trafficked persons.

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